

## Two Major Characters Differences as source of conflict in A Streetcar Named Desire

### Abstract

Character and conflict are the important elements in a play. Conflict is dominant aspect in this play. The structure of this play is best seen through a series of confrontation between Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski. The conflict is social conflict. Blanche DuBois comes from aristocracy family, and Stanley Kowalski comes from lower class. The factors of the conflict are the background and character. The background differences are heritage, wealth, and education. The character differences can be traced from astrological aspect, color preference and light avoidance. The conflict between Blanche and Stanley is caused by their different worlds.

### Introduction

Literature is a piece of writing which expresses and communicates thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards life by medium of language. It reveals so many aspects of life, dealing with human thoughts, values, problems and conflicts. It is understandable that literature is significant in life because it brings people into contact more closely with real life. Drama is one of the literary works that most interesting and unique, since it closely involves with human beings. Moody says that drama is not just description of discussion of events from real life: it is re-creation of real life (1971:63).

Tennessee Williams is one of the most America's playwrights in twentieth century. One of his works, *A Streetcar Named Desire* provides ample moral lessons, loaded with valuable problems of life. Wilson states that Williams' Great strength as playwright lies in his incisiveness in presenting human conflicts (1985:4). Williams intentionally creates some events which the character has to step some incidents of certain difficulties events, mentioned as conflict. Character in drama is more familiar because it engages the personality, behavior, and a way of speaking of the figure. Moreover, character is the most important element of drama.

The structure of this play is best seen through a series of confrontations between Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski. The conflict they have happen continuing, from simple conflicts become serious conflicts. This play is structured on the principle of presenting the two worlds, establishing what each world believes in, and then placing these worlds in a series of direct confrontations until one is destroyed.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Character, plot, point of view, setting, language, symbolism, and theme are the basic elements of dramatic literature. Character is a person created by the writer. In drama, character carried the action, language, ideas, and emotion of the play. Sometimes in a play we will find conflict that created by the two opposing characters.

Characterization is a particularly important in drama, and the writer utilize a number of technique to reveal the concerns and values of their characters. Most, obviously, characters will reveal themselves to us by what they say and do. The way in which a characters acts is generally determined by what he wants, by what happens to him and of course by his characters traits. A writer's description of a character and of the situations which cause the character to act is called motivation. Motivation is the combination of character traits and circumstances that causes a character to act in a certain manner ( Pooley, 1967: 517)

Character is close with personality. The essence of personality is the differences among people and the stability of any individual's behavior over long periods ( Hall, 1983:411). Personality is the consistency of an individual's behavior from one situation to the next ( Hall, 1983: 429). Personality influenced by Socio-Cultural such as education, religion, wealth, social custom, heritage and placed ( Munn, 1962: 253). Such Socio-Cultural influences are focused upon a child from the moment of birth and they continue to influence him all the days of his life. Socio-Cultural develop the character differences, and the differences is possible cause of conflict.

Dramatic conflict is the struggle which grows out of the interplay of opposing forces (ideas, interest, wills). Dramatic conflict can be found in three categories:

1. Elemental or Physical Conflict, a struggle between man and the physical world. It represents man versus forces of nature : the difficulties and dangers.
2. Social Conflict, a struggle between man and man. Much popular fiction is based on social conflict.
3. Internal or Psychological Conflict, a struggle between desire within a person ( Shaw, 1972:90-91)

In this play, the conflict between Blanche and Stanley is a social conflict. Social conflict is a struggle between man and man. The sources of conflicts are the differences worlds between Blanche and Stanley.

### **The possible causes of conflict**

There are two causes, the background and the character differences. The background differences such as heritage, wealth and education. The character differences such as astrological, color preference, and light avoidance. The background and character differences are possible to create conflict between Blanche and Stanley.

### **The background Differences**

The most obvious differences between Blanche and Stanley is lied in the diversity of their differences of their nationality association( Roberts, 1965:37). Recognizing the name of DuBois and Kowalski, it is known that they are very contradictory. It is assumed that a French name DuBois belongs to an aristocratic family, a name with sense of proud heritage and high esteem. Williams begins portraying Blanche through a French name translated as white woods. Her first time arriving at Elysian Fields, Blanche is illustrated so pure and innocent, dressed in a white gown. A deeper meaning of her name which means “white” symbolized as she keeps her purity of heart till the end. On the other hand, a figure of Kowalski, an ex-Master Sergeant of Engineer army corps, pictured as a low class laborer in a steel-mill. While at the same time America was tired of World War II, the ex-soldiers like Stanley, were settling back into civilian life. The opportunies were available for those whose

ambitions were simplest and whose life expectations were ordinary, were miners or mill workers. Besides, the New Orleans is suitable to mix races and ethnics like Pollack Stanley. It seems impossible to find DuBois in a laboring class as Stanley does.

The DuBois family belongs to Southern aristocracy representing the culture and the gentility of high class society. The Kowalski come from lower class society. The differences between class society. The differences between class society create culture fighting. The culture fighting create conflict. The DuBois and the Kowalski are really in deep contrast, in a way that Williams himself is Southern who was born in Mississippi. Absolutely his favorite setting is Southern character. Falk states that the Southern gentlewoman in Streetcar, Blanche DuBois, is a refined, hypersensitive, and decadent aristocrat (1961:64).

Blanche's world is Belle Reve where women are ladies. Indeed it is very contradictory to the Elysian Fields where Blanche's sister, Stella spends her life with her Pollack husband Stanley. It must be a hard adjustment for Stella to make herself accustomed, even less Blanche is, regarding where they come from, Elysian Fields, a modest apartment building in New Orleans which is apparently boisterous indicated a rough neighborhood.

Stella and her sister, Blanche were born and brought up in their family estate, Belle Reve a world of a beauty and dream. However, she and Blanche eventually are forced to adjust this commonplace. Moreover they have to get themselves accustomed to those people around. Stanley angrily tries to perceive the fact that he said. A disturbance and rowdiness are often seen and heard among the members of flats. Stella now has been well adjusted to such situations, as Blanche once said that she is very adaptable to a vulgar circumstances.

Since Blanche is raised up in a cultured family, and she once held a respectable profession as high school teacher in Laurel, definitely she is intelligent and educated as reflected from her speech. Her ability to arrange a friendly speech to her chatter's partner shows her real class. Blanche speaks in a higher level, rather than Stanley does. Blanche knows well a way to please her partner, she exactly knows how to attract

people's attention. Apart from that, Blanche tries to search values behind the words. Conversely, Stanley speaks loudly and brutally. Speaking for Stanley is just a way to release his like or dislike of something. He never consider whether it will insult his interlocutor or not. He never consider cares of it, even he lacks tolerance to other people particularly in his manner of speaking. Stanley not only has rude manner in speaking, but also profoundly enjoys the poker party with their rough humor. It reflects their low appetite of entertainment, and it certainly shows their class.

Steve : (dealing a hand) Seven card stud, (telling deals) This ole nigger is out in back of the house sittin' Down th'owing corn to the chicken when all at once he hears a loud cackle and this young hen comes lickety split around the side of the house with the rooster right behind her and gaining on her fast

Stanley : (impatient with the story) deal!

Steve : But when the rooster catches sight of the nigger th'owing the corn he put on the brakes and lets the hen get away and started pecking corn. And the old nigger says, " Lord God, I hopes I never gits that hungry I'  
( 3 : 40)

Poker game, indeed becomes the focus of the play. It illustrates a supremely male game, closely associated with chance, luck, skill, a bit cheating and hard drinking. Poker, for the American is completely a male game which has been believed to show a superiority of man. Therefore it should not be played in a house with a woman, because the presence of woman in the middle of game is considered to bring bad luck for the poker players. Noises and disputes among the players are often heard, the messy bottles of liquor, remnants of snacks and cigarette ashes are scattered around. Picturing the poker situation, it can be sketched that poker is close to the rough, brutal, yet drunken world of man. On the contrary, Blanche's preferences for entertainments are something likes teas, cocktail parties luncheons which all reflect her appetite of high rank society. However, Blanche is a good –adaptable woman, she is so tough in facing Stanle's vigor.

Blanche and Stanley have a different perspective on valuing money. Stanley has a conviction that money can control man's life, particularly in guiding him to find

pleasure in life. He regards money as the key to find happiness because money can buy this basic desire, is physical need. By means of money, he can get everything he wants, as money is a power. He views the loss of Belle Reve is the loss of money. Bearing this in mind, Stanley does whatever he can, in condition gives profit.

Stanley : Have you ever heard of the Napoleonic Code?  
Stella : No Stanley, I haven't heard of the Napoleonic Code  
and if I have, I don't see what it-  
Stanley : Let me enlighten you on a point or two, baby  
Stella : Yes?  
Stanley : in the state of Louisiana we have the Napoleonic Code  
according to which what belongs to the wife belongs to  
the husband and vice versa. For instance, if I had a piece  
of property, or you had a piece of property-

(2 : 29)

Stanley's greed on money, shown in his desire to dominate Belle Reve's documents. Stanley is excessively eager to apply the Louisiana tradition about Napoleonic code. He is the view that those document papers possess financial value. Stella's pregnancy is quite good reason to launch his desire. Since, he will welcome a baby born, a prudent preparation must be made. These inspire Stanley to justify his interest in the sale of Belle Reve. According to him, the money is really the unborn baby's as well as his and Stella's. Stanley's directly conveys it, not long after Stella says she wants to keep her pregnancy a secret from Blanche. Obviously it deals with Stanley's only desire for mastering the money. However, Blanche, by wholeheartedness allows Stanley to have those collected papers.

Blanche : ...  
(she pours the contents of the envelope on the table).  
Here all them are, all papers! I Hereby endow you  
with them! Take them, peruse them to memory, even !  
I think it's wonderfully fitting that Belle Reve should  
finally be this bunch of old papers in your big, capable  
hand! ...

(2 :36)

The background differences is one of the sources of the conflict between Blanche and Stanley. Their background differences develop their character as Munn

says that personality influenced by socio-cultural aspect (1962). It causes a different behavior. The behavior differences create cultural fighting.

### **The Character Differences**

The differences of characters can be the essential causes leading to later conflicts. Williams begin tracing the characters of the two major character's differences from astrological signs. It is believed that it can naturally influence character type of man who is born under its sign. It is also believed that a horoscope is gained by discovering the position of stars and planets at the time of his or her birth. Williams' description about Blanche and Stanley's characters are formerly from their respective astrological signs.

Stella : Stanley was born just five minutes after Christmas  
Blanche: Capricorn-the Goat!  
Stanley : What sign you born under?  
Blanche: Oh, my birthday's next month, the fifteenth of September,  
                    that's under Virgo  
Stanley: What's Virgo?  
Blanche: Virgo is the Virgin

(5: 63)

Stanley's astrological sign is Capricorn with Goat as the symbol, meanwhile Blanche under Virgo which is symbol of the virgin.

Williams depicts Blanche DuBois, as a delicate woman who was born about September and signed under Virgo, which is usually associated with a virgin and virginity. She mentally believes herself as a virgin, and tries to maintain the spirit of virgin, regardless of the fact that she has ever has sexual promiscuity with strangers. She believes that those are meaningless. She gives her body but not her deep heart. Therefore, she always convinces herself keeping her virginity. A young teens virgin is usually so fragile and so vulnerable, because she has not been mature yet. In fact, this belief affects Blanche's developing soul, she is virtually immature. Therefore, she is forever fragile and vulnerable. Meanwhile, Stanley was born about Christmas, it means that he is a Capricorn with a goat as a sign. Williams traces a goat as the ancient symbol of sexual desire. He has a manhood capacity easily forcing women to

surrender to him. He much exploits his sexual power to show his manliness capacity. His central pleasure of his life is undeniably a woman.

Another aspect of character differences is color preference. In this case, color of clothes describes the differences of their individual personality. Color preference of Blanche is white and pastels, and Stanley is bright and bold color. Williams uses clothes as a means to differentiate their character personalities.

The poker players-Stanley, Steve, Mitch and Pablo Wear colored shirts, solid blues, a purple a red- and –white cheek, a light green, and they are men at the Peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colors

( 3: 39 )

Bright color is usually worn by Stanley and his poker buddies. Bold color as they wear at night reflects indirectly their character. Stanley Kowalski, a man who lives in a basic and fundamental world, is neither endowed with subtleties nor refinements. His choices for the brave color shirts prove his masculinity and his physical manhood. Stanley is a man of physical action and rude manly manner can be seen throughout the play. It is widely contradictory to Blanche whose preferences of colors for dresses are soft such as white and pastels. In addition, the contents of her wardrobe deliberately created by Williams with the purpose of building as image that she is belonging to wealthy class society. Clothing for Blanche is the appearance in order that she is being a good looking woman. Even, she does wish to be an impressionable person for everyone who meets her.

Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suite with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earring of pearl, white gloves and hat. Looking as if she were arriving at summer tea or cocktail party garden district

(4 : 13)

Blanche's appearance at her first coming, is in sharp contrast to the Elysian Fields. Her pure white gown she wears, suggests her purity, innocence and



vulnerability. It seems that Williams much employs white color as Blanche's personality. The purity of white may apparently hide her inner sin, but her guilt she has felt since the death of her husband, Allan. In a white dress she assures herself that she dreams of a virginal purity of Virgo. A white dress also suggests Blanche's vulnerability for inability to cope with her past problems. On account of Blanche's sexual promiscuity with so many people in the past time, she then physically becomes fragile. Still against these facts, in the whole play Blanche always tries to keep the purity of her inner heart.

The next essential indicator that differentiate Blanche from Stanley is light avoidance. From Stanley's viewpoint, light represents the real world. As Stanley is a man of physical action controlled by natural instinct and he is tolerant of the feelings of others, consciously or unconsciously he often hurts around him. Stanley is a realist, straightforward conveying in something openly. Williams refers Stanley to naked bulb, Blanche cannot stand a naked light bulb. Blanche thinks that naked light bulb represent rude remark or a vulgar action. A rude and vulgar action here are real world belongs to Stanley. Stanley faces something in reality, then this is sometimes felt like a rude and a vulgar action for sensitive Blanche. Stanley's behavior is mostly based on emotional than intellectual. On the other hand, Blanche is a person who refuses the light in a naked bulb. Her fear of light is closely connected with the death of her beloved husband. Blanche cannot have the light bulb in the open glare. Therefore, she must subdue it, then covers it with a lantern bulb paper or leaves the light off. She prefers a dim candle. It means that Blanche does not want to see the reality of her bad past experience. She wants all her wrecked past life to be covered by her created illusion and imagination. Thus, Stanley who is in the converse of an idealist, depending on his natural instinct, must destroy all the illusion of Blanche.

Light avoidance is also revealed by the fact that Blanche live in her illusion and Stanley live in reality. Blanche always attempts to cover her ugly past life with her imaginative story because she cannot adjust herself to the realistic world of Stanley. Her failure to make adjustment to Stanley's world is best described with her preference to keep on covering the naked bulb. She prefers living in a shadowy world

because she does not want anyone know her real world, a world of illusion and imagination.

Blanche refers more to live under illusion, she creates some lies that according to her, these are only little illusions. Blanche often says untruth, but for the important things she does tell the truth. The first time she comes, Blanche exactly shows her inability to tell the truth of her absence from teaching and the real reason of her arrival. She is perfectly a big liar. When she means that 'a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion', she means to say that woman's charm is intentionally created to trap a man's attention. A woman deliberately deceives a man to make him want her. Blanche's deceptions to Mitch are not only for the untrue reason of her arrival, but she also intends not to inform Mitch of her real age as she wants him badly. She wants him to respect her.

Mitch claims Blanche must have lied him, but she denies that she has ever lied to him neither externally nor inside. She exactly uses some deception to trap Mitch, but those certain illusion are women's charm. Blanche frankly tells Mitch that she refuses realism. Instead, she prefers the magic of illusion. On the other hand, the realistic Stanley, with his straightforward nature, collects all the facts dealing with Blanche's untrue stories including Blanche's wretched past life and her dismissal from high school teacher staff. Blanche is totally unfortunate since Stanley is not type of man who easily tolerates the unforgivable deceit, rather than giving an apology, Stanley tends to destroy her.

Blanche is so scared of the direct light. She creates illusions by exploiting her womanly charm. The only reason is to have a secure shelter for a rest. Blanche's convictions are truly contrary to Stanley's since he is less educated yet narrow minded, it can be comprehended that his concept of love is lower and cheaper than Blanche. He regards women as the instrument to satisfy his animal desire. According to him, love is just a desire to fulfill one's passion and love is based on physical attractiveness. He has superior attitude towards women, towards Stella and Blanche. Because of his capability to be a gaudy-seed bearer, this gives him a chance to take pleasure in his masculinity. Stanley's life is to have pleasure with women.

... since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of his richly feathered male bird among hen....( 1 : 24)

It can be concluded that character differences is the source of conflict between Blanche and Stanley. The character differences such as astrological aspect, color preference and light avoidance. There are some people who believed that astrology brings some special characteristic. The color preference is also a symbol of character.

### **Conclusion**

The conflict in this play begin when Blanche's arriving in Stanley's house. It can be easily understood that the root of those conflicts is derived from their different worlds of life background. Their two different worlds are really like the two opposite poles which cannot be united. The different worlds are life background and characters differences. It may be comprehended that different social life backgrounds must produce different culture, life-styles and manners. From the two different cultures there appear different characters and personalities.

The lost of Belle Reve is the first conflict. Thus, the continual conflicts always unavoidable between Blanche and Stanley, indeed then stem from their different social life background. Blanche DuBois is a refined, hypersensitive, and decadent aristocrat. The relationship between brother-in-law and sister-in-law now becomes the relationship between enemies, and the settlement they live becomes battleground for them. The sharp differences between Blanche and Stanley is unavoidably the sources of the continual conflicts in the play.

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